

News from Ed Markey

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MARKEY WELCOMES REINSTATEMENT OF CANCELED NRC COUNTER-TERRORISM PROGRAM

WASHINGTON, DC- Rep. Ed Markey (D-Mass) today welcomed the announced reinstatement of the Nuclear Regulatory Commission's (NRC's) Operational Safeguards Response Evaluations (OSRE's). These "force on force" drills tested commercial nuclear power plants' counter-terrorism capabilities until the program was quietly canceled on September 30, 1998. After a November 3 article in the Los Angeles Times and a November 10 letter from Rep. Markey to NRC Chairman Shirley Ann Jackson called attention to the program termination, the NRC on November 10 announced that the program would be reinstated effective immediately.

Rep. Markey, a senior Democratic member of the House Energy and Power Subcommittee, which has jurisdiction over the NRC, said, "I am glad that the NRC seems to have recognized how dangerous the threat of terrorism at nuclear plants is. The bombings at the U.S. embassies in Kenya and Tanzania, and the bombing of the Oklahoma City Federal Building, showed that terrorists have the will and the way to bomb major U.S. targets. At a time when we are increasing military pressure on Iraq, when other government agencies are increasing attention to terrorism, we should not be relaxing security at nuclear plants. The NRC drills have found major security gaps at almost half the tested plants-at one plant the simulated attack could have caused a core meltdown-and has prompted the utilities to beef up their counter-terrorist capabilities. The program should be continued and extended."

Rep. Markey also noted NRC's announcement that it would "accelerate an ongoing study to determine the proper level of performance testing" and "initiate an evaluation of the adequacy of existing NRC regulations in this area." The current "design basis threats" against which nuclear plants are required to defend predate recent terrorist attacks and may not be adequate to protect against the size of current bombs or the number of people terrorist groups could command. Markey said, "we will continue to watch and work with NRC to make sure that protections are strengthened, not weakened, in their review and that communities near nuclear power plants are safe from the terrorist threat."